

A Contemporary Hell:
Analyzing Manga as Literature through Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece* "Impel Down" Storyline
and Dante Alighieri's "Inferno"

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

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ABSTRACT:

Manga, also known as Japanese comics, have a rich history in Asian culture dating back to the 12th century. Western influence is prevalent in the genre throughout its history, although its popularity in the West did not spark until recent decades. Now, hundreds of manga are translated into English and an emerging fan community hosts conventions and expos across the world.

Through a close analysis of Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece* novels, with a specific emphasis on the "Impel Down" storyline in volumes 54-56, I argue for the literary value of manga by demonstrating its intertextuality, its borrowings from Classical texts, and its ability to discredit society's negative stereotype of the genre as a whole. Although manga has remixed various famous texts, *One Piece* references different aspects of Western culture, has depth of character and story, and orchestrates some of the most unique juxtapositions between textual references. The two primary textual references I focus on are Dante Alighieri's "Inferno" from *The Divine Comedy* and the 1970s cult-classic musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I began this project with little more than a love for anime and a desire to learn more. A couple of years ago, a friend recommended the popular series *One Piece*, and after binging on episodes night after night I immediately recognized the deep layer of intellectual material hiding just under the surface. The characters and story are packed full with references to religion, works of literature, and pop culture, all of which became a game to recognize and analyze. I gained a deeper appreciation for the genre as a whole, and it wasn't long before I realized the rich thesis it could become.

As an English major, I really wanted my Honors thesis to build upon the education I have received at Ball State, and in doing so I wanted to study something my courses had not covered. Manga was the perfect solution. There was only one problem – my passion was for anime, not manga. I even

held many of the popular prejudices against manga that I explain in this paper, but I was ultimately willing to keep an open mind, and I am so glad I did.

I want to thank all of my friends and family that supported me during the course of this project. You encouraged me to keep writing when the stress was high and when I was not sure I was capable of finishing the project. But I would especially like to thank my advisor, Dr. Ellen Thorington. You tirelessly sifted through page after countless page and you never hesitated to push me to delve deeper into my ideas and analyses. You apologized for being “nit-picky” on words and phrases, but apologies were not necessary – you made me a better writer and reader. For that, I am grateful. This would not have been possible without your guidance. Again, thank you.

INTRODUCTION

"Visual media is everywhere. Images, still and moving, have spread across the globe on the wings of new technologies ... We feel like direct witnesses rather than members of a detached and distant audience." (Gurri 101-102)

Images surround us in our everyday lives. They influence our thoughts and decisions, from what we do in our leisure time to the decisions we make at the grocery store. But with the technology boom, a new type of visual culture has taken root world-wide which presents itself through image-based genres such as film, television, video games, etc. Martin Gurri, an analyst at the Director of National Intelligence Open Source Center, believes that human beings are beginning to see the world differently (101). Images frame public opinion in politics, influence decision-making through advertisements, and provide the most engaging form of entertainment. Manga is the most recent of these image-based genres to gain popularity and take the world by storm. Loosely defined as "Japanese comics" (Ingulsrud 23), and more intricately defined as "a long Japanese tradition of art that entertains [which] has taken on a physical form imported from the West" (Schodt, *Dreamland* 21), manga are a series of drawings laid out in panels accompanied by word balloons to tell a story. Some manga are released weekly in magazines, some serially in bound volumes, and others as stand-alone novels. It is celebrated across the world by all ages and cultures. Frederik L. Schodt, translator, writer, and scholar of manga, writes "Manga and anime works are now widely available in translated form, multiple monthly English-language magazines cover both industries [manga and anime], and there are even conventions for non-Japanese fans held around the world several times a year" (*Dreamland* 11). But despite the developing fan base, manga still has negative connotations in the West. In order to overcome these stigmas and begin to value manga for its literary and educational value, it is important to first understand its origins.

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF MANGA

Many scholars believe manga began as *fūshi*, or caricature, a pictorial form that slanders or criticizes by using wit and sarcasm (Ito 26). Caricatures in Japan were first discovered hidden on the backs of planks in the ceilings of various temples, showing exaggerated people, animals, and *phalli* (Ito 26). The caricatures eventually made their way to scrolls; the earliest known caricature that seems to be a predecessor to manga, Bishop Toba's (1053-1140) *Chōjū giga* ("The Animal Scrolls"), dates to the 12th and 13th centuries (Ito 26). "The Animal Scrolls," pictured below in Figure 1¹ are a four-part series of



Figure 1: Panels from Bishop Toba's "The Animal Scrolls." The scrolls are housed in the Kozan Temple in Kyoto. ¹

brush-and-ink drawings of birds and animals

"parodying the decadent lifestyle of the upper class" (Ito 26). Scholars debate whether or not Toba was the sole artist involved in the creation of "The Animal Scrolls." Some believe that the final two scrolls may have been created sometime in the mid-13th century, which places them after Toba's death in 1140.

However, scrolls were rare and available only to certain elites (Ito 27). When woodblock-printing technology emerged in the 17th century (Ito 28), caricatures became accessible to wider audiences. Caricatures were easier to produce, which allowed artists to branch out of the normal sarcastic presentation of caricature. Some printed during this period took on more serious subject matter, like religion or the state of social conditions (Ito 26-28). Around 1704-11, woodblock printed drawings

¹ Image [*Chōjū Giga*: Scroll A] used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code. Available at: <http://www.kokingumi.com/index.html> (21 May 2016)
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transitioned to an art form known as *Toba-e*, “witty and comical caricatures from everyday life” that attempted to replicate Toba’s style (Ito 28). *Toba-e* caricatures were published in the city of Osaka via woodblock-printing technologies, which Kinko Ito marks as the beginning of the commercial publishing industry (28). *Toba-e* spread throughout Japan from Osaka all the way to the city of Edo, or modern day Tokyo (Ito 28).

But Japanese caricatures didn’t begin to morph into a form contemporary audiences might recognize until 1716-36 with *akahon*, which translates to “a red book” (Ito 28). *Akahon* was part of a larger genre known as *kusazōshi*. *Kusazōshi* was an umbrella term for a group of smaller forms that were named for the color of their cover and their style of bookbinding (Ito 28). While *akahon* began as illustrated representations of classic fairy tales, it later morphed into more mature illustrated books meant for adults (Ito 28). But what makes *akahon* so similar to today’s manga is the way that it sometimes accompanied its illustrations with captions, like text balloons in contemporary manga novels. Later caricature art forms include *kibyōshi*, “yellow-jacket books” which “mocked conventional mores through humor, jokes, satire, and cartoons” (Ito 28), and *ukiyo-e*, which translates to “pictures of the floating world” (Ito 28). Despite the many forms that evolved from caricature, Schodt believes that contemporary manga are direct descendants from *toba-e* and a later form of *kusazōshi*, *kibyōshi*, or “yellow-jacket books” (Schodt *Dreamland* 22). Both were mass-produced, often issued in series, and were hot commodities to the public (Schodt *Dreamland* 22). Schodt even says “they were the world’s first comic books” (Schodt *Dreamland* 22).

However, the word “manga” did not emerge until sometime in the early to mid-1800s with the artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) (Ito 29). Hokusai was a master of multiple styles. He created “The Thirty-six Scenes of Mt. Fuji,” a “multicolored woodblock print of flowers and birds,” in the *ukiyo-e* style (Ito 29). He later tried his hand at *Toba-e* with a series of woodblock prints in which the subjects had

elongated limbs to represent action, titled *Furyū odoke hyakku* (Ito 29). Hokusai published a 15-volume work titled *Hokusai manga*, pictured in Figure 2 to the right², famous for criticizing social conditions (Ito 29). *Hokusai manga* is the first time the word *manga* was used in caricature, but it was not used to define the genre until the Taishō period in Japan between 1912 and 1926. Up until then, it was referred to as “*ponchi* (punch) and *ponchi-e* (punch picture) as well as Toba-e, Ōtsu-e, *Odoke-e*, *kok-keiga* (funny pictures), and *kyōga* (crazy pictures)” (Ito 30).



Figure 2: Ghosts from a page in Katsushika Hokusai's *Hokusai Manga* Volume 10. ²

Manga continued to change and evolve along with its name. Although it was a common form of entertainment in the days of woodblock printing, its popularity boomed during the latter half of the 19th century. Ito suggests that it officially “started to permeate people’s everyday lives along with *giga ukiyo-e* (funny or playful caricatures) and illustrated newspapers (29) – much like the “funnies” section of American papers. Its increasing popularity became evident when the Japanese government chose to display *Hokusai manga* and other works from the genre at the World Exposition in Pairs in 1867 (Ito 29). Manga was officially part of mainstream Japanese culture, and it slowly moved beyond Japan to the outside world.

Many scholars believe that manga did not develop into its modern form until after World War II. Prior to the war, magazines for children and adults alike started to popularize serialized manga. Once

² Image [Volume 10: Ghosts] used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code. Available at: <http://library.princeton.edu/news/2014-12-16/hokusai%E2%80%99s-manga> (21 May 2016)
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the series were finished, they would be compiled and published as hardcover volumes. In 1940, the New Japan Manga Artists' Association (Shin Nihon Mangaka Kyōkai) was formed and they published their first magazine, titled *Manga*, in October of the same year. According to Ito, *Manga* usually featured work that "depicted attacking and destroying the American and British armies" (34). In fact, most manga

during this period is pro-war propaganda, because the



Figure 3: A 1969 cover from the avant-garde manga magazine established in Japan in 1964.³

Japanese government demanded it from the manga artists of the time. But many artists were also drafted as soldiers and deployed, or put out of work because paper became so scarce that none was allocated for cartoons (Ito 34). After the war, a three-year "manga boom" produced a variety of genre magazines and served to raise the spirits of the poor and discouraged Japanese citizens (Ito 35). By the late sixties, sales of manga magazines exceeded the millions. *Garo*, pictured to the left in Figure 3³, was a magazine that emerged in 1964 and specialized in avant-garde manga (Kavan). A new genre even emerged that specifically targeted young girls, *Shōjo manga*.

(Ito 37-39). But Ito states that manga did not gain true legitimacy and popularity as an entertainment medium until the 1980s, when sales increased from 2.5 million in 1982 all the way to 5 million in 1988 (43). In the 90s, manga cafes began to pop up across the nation, with 300 in Tokyo alone (Ito 45).

Today, manga have become so popular in the U.S. that there are multiple English-language publishing houses dedicated to it. VIZ Media has published thousands of manga novels, and they are

³ Image [Garo NO. 65 1969] used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code. Available at: <http://kathykavan.posthaven.com/garo-avant-garde-manga-magazine-covers-japan> (21 May 2016)
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responsible for bringing some of the most popular series to English, including *Naruto*, *Dragon Ball*, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* Even Hachette, known in the publishing world as one of the Big Four, has its own manga imprint, Yen Press. Manga are published in a variety of sub-genres like action, romance, drama, sci-fi, etc.; many of the generic genres that are used to describe other novels and films can be applied to manga, but they are also categorized by the age and gender they target. The multiple categories include, but are not limited to, *kodomo* (children's manga); *shōnen* (boy's manga); *shōjo* (girl's manga); *redizu* (manga for women that tends to be sexually explicit); *fujin* (women's manga that focuses on housework and childbearing); *yangu* (manga for young adult men); and *seijinshi* (manga for adults, usually with the most serious content) (Insulgrud & Allen 8-15). The lines between these categories continue to blur as new manga flood the market. Some are now employing styles that were typical of another; for example the big eyes and panel arrangements of *shōjo* have recently been used in *shōnen*. It is not uncommon for readers to switch between genres and categories, or to enjoy manga intended for another demographic.

II. WESTERN INFLUENCE IN MANGA

Paul Gravett argues that manga owes part of its development to Western influence. In *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics*, he states "manga might never have come into being without Japan's long cultural heritage being soundly disrupted by the influx of Western cartoons, caricatures, newspaper strips, and comics. To deny this is to rewrite history" (18). It is hard to argue with Gravett's grand statement. After its appearance at the World Exposition in Paris in 1867, manga has grown into a worldwide phenomenon. It attracts Western audiences and references Western works from Antiquity to contemporary pop culture.

But Western influence started early in manga development, possibly even earlier than the World Exposition of 1867. Ito speculates that it began around 1853 when American Commodore

Matthew C. Perry visited Japan and encouraged the nation to reopen its borders to the rest of the world (29). Shogun control in Japan collapsed as other countries started forcing their way back into trade agreements with the country. It became evident that contact with the outside world was inevitable, so in 1868 the emperor promoted “the seeking of knowledge throughout the world in order to strength the country” (Gravett 10). Thus, if Japan had to interact with foreign countries, they were going to make sure they were doing it on their own terms and for their own gain. Gravett praises the nation for the ability to continually “absorb a foreign concept, adapt and improve on it, and then export it back to the outside world” (10). This is evident throughout Japanese history, and even throughout the development of manga. Japan certainly contributed customs and traditions to what manga is today, but without the influence of American comics and film, manga’s contemporary form would look very different. American comics appeared in Japan around 1945 (Gravett 13), and Gravett states “They have taken the fundamentals of American comics, the relationships between picture, frame and word, and, by fusing them with their own traditional love for popular art that entertains, have ‘Japanized’ them” (10). While this is true, manga are not just Western comics in another language. The West is still concerned with newspaper comic strips, short magazines, or superhero movies, but manga has the ability to “embrace long, free-form narratives on almost every subject, for both sexes and almost every age and social group” (Gravett 10).



Figure 4: A page from Osamu Tezuka's famous manga series *Astro Boy*.⁴

Aside from American comics, Western influence on manga also came from the cinema. Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989) is sometimes referred to as the “God of manga.” Gravett says “his influence in Japan could be as equivalent to that of Walt Disney, Hergé, Will Eisner and Jack Kirby rolled into one ... Several commentators suggest that Tezuka should be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature” (24). His famous series *Astro Boy*, pictured in Figure 4⁴ above, ran from 1962 to 1968 and is still popular today (“Astro Boy”). After contributing nearly 150,000 pages of work for 600 manga titles (Gravett 24), Tezuka named the cinema as his main storytelling influence (Gravett 26). As a young boy, he saw many “Hollywood adventures, Saturday-morning serials and British thrillers” (Gravett 26). After Japan entered World War II in 1941, foreign films were banned and replaced with patriotic propaganda (Gravett 26). After the war, Western films that were previously screened in America and Europe flooded into Japan, and Tezuka’s love of cinema transformed manga. Since his creations needed more space to convey emotion, he used Western film as a model which led to the first manga publication printed in the *akahon* form (Gravett 28).

Despite the level of Western influence in manga, it took a long time for the genre to gain legitimacy in the West. Gravett writes that “manga were, and still are, open to being doubly damned in the West for being Japanese, and for being comics” (8). Although historians might disagree, anime scholars blame General Douglas MacArthur for the turmoil between the nations. When MacArthur was recalled from his work restoring Japan after World War II, he gave a speech in which he referred to the Japanese as being “like a boy of twelve” (Gravett 8). According to Gravett and other scholars, he did not mean to sound patronizing since he admired the Japanese for their quick assimilation of new ideas, but the West now saw the Japanese as “childlike, immature, very much the dependent junior to a

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paternalistic America" (Gravett 8). Within two decades, the influx of Japanese cars, electronics, and other products into Western nations proved these notions wrong. Gravett speculates that the West's distaste for manga derives from the fear and distrust in Japan as a rising nation. Japan's status rose from a boy of twelve to an international power-house, but Western nations became even more confused when manga started pouring out of Japan alongside these other products. How could a grown man produce quality technology while reading comic books packed with sexual content, violence, and fantasy? The West became even more disturbed and unsettled with Japan when the view shifts from a boy of twelve to "the boy now occupying an adult body and displaying a taste for the disgusting and cruel" (Gravett 9).

Although the reasons behind the sudden change in opinion are unclear, manga managed to find a place in the Western world. Schodt speculates that it might be because popularity of manga in Japan itself "became so huge that the rest of the world could not ignore it. Fans mushroomed in other Asian countries, then in Europe, and finally in North America" (viii). Gravett, on the other hand, believes the anti-manga prejudice is still prevalent but in new forms. I would agree with Gravett, although loosely. A strong fan base for manga has developed in Western nations. The genre has also become a subject of academic study and is celebrated for its creative achievements. Nevertheless, prejudices against it will continue to persist in the West as long as manga is misunderstood.

III. MANGA AS LITERATURE

If manga was formerly discredited in the West as merely a form of entertainment, convincing people to consider it a literary genre was almost laughable. Although manga is gaining more credibility in academia, "the motivation to study comics has been prompted less by the drive to reinterpret the medium as fine art but more to examine them with a postmodern imperative, viewing them as cultural products where attitudes, ideology, and taste intersect" (Insulgrud & Allen 24-25). Today, however,

manga is quickly gaining credibility among scholars and educators alike, and awareness of manga's literary value is spreading. The Anime Expo in 2014, an annual festival that celebrates Japanese pop culture, featured a panel of scholars that transformed their love for anime and manga into academic careers. They hoped to help fans explore the deeper meaning behind the genre, and organizer Mikhail Koulikv said, "One goal of the program is to validate fans' deep interest in anime and manga and let them see how it can be part of their college studies and perhaps even lead to a career in research or academia" (Hardesty). Conventions like the Anime Expo are popping up all around the country, and manga are criticized less and less.

In *Reading Cool Japan* Insulgrud and Allen state "although manga are widely accepted as reading material for all ages, they are not considered products of high culture" (50). Scholars studying manga hope to change this. According to Insulgrud and Allen, one of the biggest reasons manga is not seen as literature is that commentary tends to be "in the popular tone of manga themselves," descriptive, and sentimental rather than critical (50). They studied the sources that inform researchers about manga and separate them into two sections: one section is a commentary that tends to celebrate manga, and may be most valuable in analysis (Insulgrud & Allen 50-51). The other section, written by scholars of manga studies, involves more "literary criticism, social analysis, economic analysis, discourse analysis, and literary studies" (Insulgrud & Allen 51). *Reading Cool Japan* suggests the latter group may be academically superior to those that write commentary, but I would argue that both sections should be studied in tandem in order to fully appreciate manga and its place in the literary world. One of the most important events in manga studies was the establishment of The Japan Society for the Study of Cartoons and Comics at Kyoto Seika University in 2001 (Insulgrud & Allen 54). The society has since moved to the International Manga Museum and publishes a journal titled *Manga Studies* that houses articles on "literary criticism, media studies, education, and even literacy" in relation to manga (Insulgrud & Allen 54).

The most common definition of literacy is the ability to read and write, but that does not take into account comprehension and analysis. I would argue that reading words on a page, without the ability to comprehend or analyze them, is not literacy. Japan has one of the highest literacy rates in the world despite manga being the one of the most popular and best-selling reading materials. So how do the two relate to one another, and why are manga still trivialized in the West? Naturally, not everyone in Japan reads manga, and manga is certainly not the cause of high literacy rates. But manga is often seen as detrimental to education in the West – defined by parents as a distraction or “brain-cell killer,” clumped into the same category as video games and violent Saturday morning cartoons. These parental fears are irrational; if such a large portion of Japan’s population reads manga and the country still maintains a high literacy rate, the genre cannot be as detrimental as its reputation suggests, just like cartoons never managed to corrupt our children. In fact, they may contribute to a different kind of education. They teach the reader to interpret visuals in conjunction with text, to think critically about the role of popular culture in society, and sometimes even to reference or remediate existing texts. Readers thus analyze and evaluate the decisions made in the comparison between texts.

Inslugrud and Allen suggest that in order to fully understand manga, we need to become “manga-literate” and that “reading manga is far from a mindless activity,” (2). They see manga as “multimodal” texts and suggest that there is a complex process running in the brain



Figure 5: The cover for the English translation of *Romeo x Juliet*, published by Yen Press.⁵

while reading manga. If a text is multimodal, it presents different modes (layout of the page, words, graphics, motion lines, etc.) in layers and “a reader must process and interpret the meanings of these



Figure 6: The cover for the first volume of the Japanese edition of *The Seven Deadly Sins*.⁶

layers in order to build an understanding of the text ...

Furthermore, the reader learns to recognize the intertextuality of past narratives and other voices” (4-5). This suggests a difference between being literate and being manga literate, because a different set of interpretive skills are used. In fact, a large number of manga reference existing texts or works of art. This intertextuality can be studied and analyzed. Examples include *Romeo x Juliet*, pictured in Figure 5⁵ above. A loose, fantastical interpretation of Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, the manga places Verona on a floating island in the sky while the Montagues savagely murder the Capulets in pursuit of the throne and force Juliet into hiding.

Another example is *The Seven Deadly Sins*, shown in Figure 6⁶ to the left. This manga takes place in a setting roughly similar to medieval Britain where the knights are representations of Christianity’s Seven Deadly Sins.

A manga series that uses intertextuality on a large scale is Eiichiro Oda’s *One Piece*. Oda started his manga career at 17, when he submitted a “one-shot cowboy manga” titled *Wanted!* to the Tezuka manga awards and won second place (“Eiichiro Oda”), although the rumor among fans is that he announced his dream to become a manga artist at age four. After his *Wanted!* debut, Oda went on to

⁵ Image [*Romeo x Juliet*] used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code.
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work as assistant for some of the most distinguished artists in the manga publishing industry, such as Nobuhiro Watsuki (“Eiichiro Oda”), known for his series *Rurouni Kenshin*. *One Piece* was first published in the Weekly Shonen Jump magazine in the U.S. in 1997 (“Eiichiro Oda”). Since then, it has become one of the most popular and best-selling manga series worldwide. In 2013 *Anime News Network* reported 345 million copies in circulation worldwide, with 300 million in Japan alone (“One Piece Manga Has 345...”).

Oda’s *One Piece* tells the adventures of Monkey D. Luffy and his crew of misfit pirates as they travel through the seas of the expansive fictional world. Every island has a new adventure to offer and a new foe to conquer that stands in the way of Luffy’s dream to become King of the Pirates and collect the one piece, the ultimate hidden treasure. One manga scholar writes the series off as “readily comprehensible fare” (Thomas viii), but what I think he fails to consider is that *One Piece* is accessible to various audiences on several different levels. It can certainly be “readily comprehensible” to a general audience that finds a spot on Luffy’s ship purely for entertainment. But what makes *One Piece* truly unique is that Oda references and transforms many works of Classical literature and Western pop culture, and uses such references to create complex characters, build unique islands, and drive the plot. Examples of this can be found across the series in biblical references, characters based on fairy tales, and recreations of popular novels such as *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Volumes 54-56 of the on-going 80-volume manga take place in an underwater military prison known as Impel Down. Impel Down appears to be a replica of Dante Alighieri’s “The Inferno” from *The Divine Comedy*, and Luffy’s character even hints at ties to Homer’s Odysseus from *The Odyssey* and Virgil’s Aeneas from *The Aeneid*. Oda juxtaposes Dante’s levels of Hell against a secret, hidden level known as Level 5.5, or NewKama Land, which is written as a replica of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The two references simultaneously complement and oppose one another, encouraging the reader to analyze their connectedness and consider them as a whole, rather than two separate units. This is what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, new media

critics, define as remediation in film but can also be applied to other genres like manga. They say “they do not contain any overt reference to the novels on which they are based; they certainly do not acknowledge that they are adaptations ... The content has been borrowed, but the medium has not been appropriated or quoted ... We call the representation of one medium in another remediation” (44-45).

Manga like *One Piece* attract a variety of audiences, despite Thomas’ criticism. Based on surveys administered by Insulgrud and Allen, *One Piece* was listed as a top three favorite manga among males and females in three age groups: junior high school students, senior high school students, and college age students (160-170). It is even popular among adults and scholars, but *One Piece* attracts more than just a variety of age groups. It appeals to different types of readers, too, from those who read it for recreational purposes; to those who read it to recognize and appreciate the references and connections between main text and source text; and still others who read it for educational value. I think artists like Oda create for the former two audiences, because manga was intended as entertainment from its beginnings as caricature. Thus it seems safe to assume that most manga artists today create their art in order to entertain their audience. Most manga readers suggest that the short textual entries and the pictures are relaxing and fun to interpret after a long day. But with the vast number of manga that remediate existing texts, works of art, pop culture, etc., a second type of audience emerges – those that read manga because they recognize and appreciate references to source texts. Artists carefully and creatively weave in these references, and it can be a game to spot them all. I think it is common for these first two audiences to intersect, since searching for the intertextual connections might also be a form of entertainment.

A developing third audience, those that read manga for its educational value is growing quickly. This audience includes several sub-categories: those who read manga to educate themselves on

Japanese language and culture; those who study manga in academia; and those who teach manga as a learning tool in the classroom. Teaching manga in the classroom is one of the newest and most criticized uses of the genre, although the material can be taught in various ways. Because of its many references to literature, manga has emerged in English classrooms of countless middle schools and high schools. There has been a shift in the way contemporary students think and process information and some teachers have found a shift to a visual style of learning necessary. While the study of original works of literature is important, contemporary students grow more and more out of touch with the language and cultural references used in such works every day, making them more difficult to understand. The demand for new ways to engage students means that educators must use all tools at their disposal, including manga. Manga furnish entertaining texts that reference literature studied in the classroom; there are some that borrow from works by Shakespeare and Jane Austen, from classics such as *Moby Dick*, and from the fairy tale tradition. These manga, among others, can be used as introductions to or in tandem with the original texts as a way to practice comparative and analytical skills, provide examples for creative remediation projects, and even study how the two works exist in their respective time periods and cultures.

IV. ANALYSIS

"The general consensus among readers in Japan today seems to be that comics have as much to say about life as novels or films. But surely one of their greatest accomplishments is to render visually fascinating the most improbable subjects – such as mah jongg, chopping vegetables, and even school examinations. This is done by exaggerating actions and emotions to the point of melodrama, and by paying loving attention to the minute details of everyday life. As the Japanese describe them, their comics are very 'wet,' as opposed to 'dry'; that is, they are unashamedly human and sentimental." (Schodt 16, *Manga! Manga!*)

Visual story-telling has made its place in pop-culture, but the skills required to process and interpret it are surprisingly underdeveloped. Gurri states "Visual material is felt far more viscerally than text, and human beings are far less skilled at guarding their judgment against this style of persuasion," (102). Thus, it is more difficult for us to interpret visual context clues as compared to textual. As Gurri

explains, “visual material tends to be regarded as noise rather than signal” (103), but he believes that visual literacy – a methodology to understanding an interpreting visual media – should be taught. I would argue that reading manga may be a key component to developing a stronger visual literacy, because it uses visuals in conjunction with text. In fact, most manga use more visuals than text, which is what makes manga so different from American graphic novels that rely heavily on text. Gravett states “text and images were developed in tandem in Japan” (20), thus the Japanese are more equipped to read and write works that better incorporate images and visual clues. In the West, “We have developed a culture of learning based on reading and writing texts, with no corresponding emphasis on visual literacy” (Gurri 102). A wider acceptance of manga culture in the West, as well as utilizing the genre in schools and other academic settings, is a step toward solving this problem. Manga asks the reader to examine the image for body language, facial expressions, and action lines; in a sense, it is a form that appears simple on the surface, but it challenges and pushes the boundaries of its audience. It can be argued that literature does the same thing. If a novel is read at the surface level it seems simple, but if the reader delves into the layers underneath, it reveals the depth. I would argue that manga can and should be seen as literature with real literary and educational value.

Through a close analysis of Oda’s *One Piece* novels, with a specific emphasis on Impel Down in volumes 54-56, I argue for that literary and education value of manga, as well as its potential to teach visual literacy, by demonstrating its intricate use of intertextuality through Classical texts, evaluating its various uses in intellectual stimulation, and discrediting society’s negative stereotyping of the genre as a whole. I focus on *One Piece* for the purposes of this analysis because it is a particularly good example. It brings together a wide range of Western references, demonstrates a depth of character and story, and orchestrates the most unique juxtapositions between texts. It is important to note that my view is influenced by my Western perspective and this study is limited by my lack of Japanese-language skills and base knowledge of Japanese culture. But I find myself learning more about Japan and its history as I

delve deeper into the study of manga. Although manga has a host of benefits, one of which is closely experiencing a foreign culture, I think it is important to first understand how the genre affects our own culture. With that base understanding, we may be able to breach the divide between fans and skeptics and open the door to a deeper study of Japanese culture.

CHAPTER 1

One Piece: A Vast, Fantastical Sea

The *One Piece* universe is a vast expanse of seas and islands, all of which Monkey D. Luffy, captain of the Straw Hat Pirates and the main protagonist of the series, hopes to explore in search of the one piece, the ultimate hidden treasure that would make him King of the Pirates. With 53 volumes and 522 chapters preceding the Impel Down plot line that I analyze in chapters 2 and 3, base background knowledge of the series is necessary in order to fully understand my argument. In this chapter, I provide brief explanations of the world in *One Piece*, the government structure, and other important aspects of the series.⁷

I. Geography

The geography of the *One Piece* world might be one of the most confusing aspects of the series, but it is important to understand in order to evaluate how people in the fictional world relate to one another. In fact, the world might still be a mystery to some fans of the series, since Oda only reveals information about it as the story progresses. It is not until volume 25 chapter 392 that a geographical model of the world appears in the manga, shown in Figure 7⁸ to the right.



Figure 7: A physical model of the *One Piece* universe seen in volume 25 chapter 392.⁸

⁷ All information provided about the *One Piece* universe is taken directly from Eiichiro Oda's 80+ volumes of VIZ Media's English translation of the *One Piece* series.

⁸ Image used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the

Oda centers the entire world around the Blue sea, which is split into the Four Blues: the North Blue, South Blue, East Blue, and West Blue. The Four Blues are split into four sections, like the quadrants on a coordinate plane, by the Grand Line and the Red Line. The Red line is solid continent and is positioned as the Prime Meridian of the Blue Sea. The Grand Line is a series of islands that stretches across the Blue Sea similar to the Earth's equator.

The Grand Line, one of the most dangerous sections of sea in the *One Piece* world, is split into two halves: the first half is unpredictable and traversed mainly by pirates, but the second half known as the New World, is the most dangerous and unpredictable body of water, making it almost impossible to navigate. Most pirates never cross into the New World alive, and those that do have trouble surviving on the other side. The Calm Belts are part of what make the Grand Line so daunting. Bordering each side of the Grand Line, they are strips of ocean with no current and no blowing winds, which makes it impossible for ships to sail through them without a motor of some sort. The Calm Belts are also populated by Sea Kings; giant, vicious sea creatures. Luffy's crew is headed for the New World when they are separated and Luffy finds himself on the island Amazon Lily, located in one of the Calm Belts. Impel Down, the naval prison modeled after Dante's levels of Hell, is situated in the middle of the Calm Belt.

II. Government

All of the seas in the *One Piece* universe are controlled by a World Government, a singular governmental institution that rules over most of the world, led by the Five Elders. The Elders are the five heads of the government; their identities are unknown. Although each island has a separate government to take care of small internal matters, the World Government presides over all important

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decisions and international affairs that may affect multiple locations. This government system is made up of three essential segments: the Marine fleet, Cipher Pol, and the Seven Warlords. There is also a group of nobles, known as the Celestial Dragons, who are directly related to the creation of the World Government and thus exercise control and power over common citizens.

The Marines are the primary military fleet under the Government. As the largest branch, the Marines are stationed across all Four Blues and work to uphold the laws of the Government, apprehend criminals, and carry out even the most questionable of orders without hesitation. Cipher Pol and the Seven Warlords are smaller, more select departments within the Government. For example, the Seven Warlords are typically the most heinous pirates sailing the seas. They ally themselves with the World Government, obeying orders and carrying out missions in exchange for free reign, but they usually feel no sense of loyalty to the Government and only uphold their end of the agreement as long as it benefits them – thus they cannot be fully trusted. They are not respected by the Marines or their fellow pirates, but they are feared and respected by everyone for their powerful reputation. On the other hand, Cipher Pol is a series of secret organizations consisting of fiercely loyal agents scattered at different stations in the different seas. While the Marines mostly take care of citizen disputes and criminal misdemeanors, Cipher Pol organizations handle threats to the Government and world as a whole. Existence of the main Cipher Pol operation, units C-0 through C-9, is unknown to the general public, because they tend to use under-the-table methods to gather information, including assassination, blackmail, etc.

The Celestial Dragons are a group of nobles that are thought to be directly related to the founders of the World Government. They tend to be portrayed as pretentious and arrogant; they even wear clear, bubble-shaped helmets over their heads with an air-filtering system so they don't have to breathe the same air as common citizens. Due to their direct descent from the original government leaders, they have a lot of influence in the government and benefit from special treatment. The first

time some of the Celestial Dragons are seen in the series, Oda shows them taking innocent people off the streets and ordering them to become their personal slaves. CP-0, the most feared segment of Cipher Pol, is under direct control of the Celestial Dragons, which exemplifies government corruption.

The World Government incites fear in some; anger in others; and in most, those who have not witnessed the actions of the government first-hand, security. Oda often portrays the government as corrupted and individualist, because most individuals that hold power within the government use the excuse of justice to further personal gain. But for Luffy, the Government poses a threat. He is a “wanted” criminal for his reputation as one of the most dangerous pirates with a bounty of 300 million berries on his head – berries being the main form of currency in the *One Piece* series. Due to his high bounty, Luffy is constantly forced to defeat and escape government officials and bounty hunters in order to protect his crew and become the King of the Pirates. But as Luffy’s crew heads for the New World, they are intercepted by Kuma. This character is the rare member of the Seven Warlords who not only allies with the Government, but remains loyal to it. The Government took advantage of this and transformed his body into a war-fighting cyborg. Kuma uses his powers to transport the Straw Hat Pirates to separate islands and Luffy vows to find and protect his friends. The World Government plays a pressing role in the Impel Down storyline, as explained in chapter 2.

III. Devil Fruits

In the spirit of the *Bible*, strange forbidden fruits, known as devil fruits, can be found around the Blue Sea. Once eaten, they give those who consume them a strangely unique and interesting power, but the user gains a weakness to sea water, and touching it makes them immobile. The fruits are generally feared and avoided by commoners, but they are sought out by pirates and other criminals. They are sometimes even eaten by military personnel, especially those with a lot of power within the Government, in order to fight criminals on an even playing field. There can only be one of each type of

fruit at a time, and because each fruit gives different powers, each devil fruit user has different abilities. There are different types of fruits which determine the power type. For example Zoan-type fruits allow the user to transform into another beast or creature; Paramecia-type fruits alter the physical body or the surrounding environment; and Logias-type fruits transform the user into natural elements. Luffy's devil fruit, the Gum-Gum Fruit, is a Paramecia-type which rubberizes his body, allowing him to stretch and manipulate his limbs at will. Devil fruit powers become extremely important during the Impel Down storyline.

IV. A Brother's Sacrifice

Portgaz D. Ace, also known as Fire Fist Ace because of the powers he gained by eating the Flame-Flame devil fruit, is Luffy's adopted older brother. Ace is wanted not only because of his own crimes, but because of his biological father's: Gol D. Roger, the most famous pirate in history who planted the legendary One Piece treasure and Luffy's hero. Thus, Ace's real name is Gol D. Ace. His identity was hidden from the rest of the world for years, but the World Government never stopped trying to seek out and execute Roger's kin.

Ace came to live with Luffy when they were children. Vice Admiral Garp, Luffy's grandfather, secretly promised Roger that he would look after the pirate's son. Luffy was already in the care of a foster mother due to his own father's notoriety as head of the Revolutionary Army seeking to overthrow the World Government. It was not hard for Garp to find a place for Ace alongside Luffy. Although Ace often pretended to be annoyed with Luffy, he took the natural role of protective older brother and never failed to show pride in his sibling's accomplishments. The bond between the two only grew stronger after their other adopted brother, Sabo, was pronounced dead while they were still children.

Ace's protective tendencies did not disappear with age. In fact, his desire to protect Luffy ultimately resulted in his capture. Marshall D. Teach, also known as Blackbeard, was a member of Whitebeard's pirate crew along with Ace before Blackbeard went rogue and murdered a crewmate. Blackbeard has a history of using his resources and those around him to gain what he wants, and his last encounter with Ace was no exception. After fleeing from his position on Whitebeard's crew, Blackbeard planned to capture Luffy and hand him over to the World Government for the bounty reward and to gain the trust of the Government so he might be considered as the next member of the Seven Warlords. When Ace heard about Blackbeard's plans he tried to stop him. Blackbeard ultimately defeated Ace and decided to hand him into the Government instead. Since Ace is Gol D. Roger's son, the trade still gained Blackbeard the status of Seven Warlord. Ace was placed on the lowest level of Impel Down and scheduled for execution.

CHAPTER 2

Dante's "Inferno": A Living Hell

Oda creates Impel Down, a prison modeled after Dante's "Inferno," near the middle of the series (Volumes 54-56). In a way that recalls Dante the pilgrim's own experience, this part of *One Piece* takes place during a turning point in Luffy's life. For the first time since he set out to sea with little more than a rowboat and a dream to become Pirate King, Luffy finds himself alone and separated from his crew on a strange island. Seven Warlord Kuma used his cyborg powers to intercept the Straw Hat Pirates and drop them on separate islands throughout the Blue Sea. Luffy finds himself on Amazon Lily situated in the Calm Belt. The island is populated by a village of fierce warrior women that seem to be inspired by the Amazon woman warriors famous in Greek mythology. Men are seen as a threat and thus are banned from the island. Luffy is about to be thrown to the Sea Kings when the island's empress, Boa Hancock, falls in love with him, going against all principal expectations of the tribe. Hancock is one of the Seven Warlords because the power and prestige helps protect the island from outsiders.

Luffy is oblivious to Hancock's affection and plans to leave Amazon Lily to reunite with his crew on the same island where they disappeared. But before he makes the journey, he learns about Ace's arrest. In Volume 18 Chapter 159, not long after Luffy became a pirate, Ace had given Luffy a vivre card so that the brothers would always be connected to one another. A vivre card is a piece of paper made from a portion of an individual's fingernails that can effectively locate that person. It can be torn in pieces and the halves will also pull toward one another, allowing the user to locate the other person. But it can also indicate the strength and life-force of the other person. After Luffy hears about Ace's capture, he checks the vivre card and finds it burned and diminished. Luffy is determined to find and save Ace. Thus, the Impel Down storyline begins.

I. An Impenetrable Prison

Impel Down is an underwater impenetrable maximum-security prison structured after Dante's nine circles of Hell in the "Inferno." No one has ever managed to break in and only one person has ever broken out. Situated in the middle of the Calm Belt, its high security is maximized by Sea Kings and the unescapable nature of the current-less strip of sea. Impel Down is full of references to Dante not just in the architectural structure, but in the beasts and the characters as well. Hancock even calls it "a taste of the underworld" (*Volume 54: UnStoppable* 67). The only way into to the prison is by means of a current. To reach the current, one must first pass through "The Gates of Justice," which are similar to the Gates of Hell in the "Inferno" (*Dante* 23). The last line of the inscription on the Gates of Hell reads "FORSAKE ALL HOPE, ALL YOU THAT ENTER HERE" (23). As in Dante's "Inferno," those who enter Impel Down's Gates of Justice will never leave. Hence, the inscription Dante provides on the Gates of Hell applies equally to those entering Impel Down. This is further emphasized by the location of the Gates of Justice, which are only accessible at two different islands: Enies Lobby and the Marine Headquarters. They connect to one another via a strong current, called the Tarai Current, which connects the three islands in a triangle formation. Since they are all located in the Calm Belt and since the current can only be accessed from the islands, the middle of the triangle almost acts like the Bermuda Triangle – if someone is stuck there, they will most likely never be seen again.

While traveling through the dark wood before his descent into Hell, Dante comes across some dangerous beasts: "a light swift leopard with a spotted coat" (14); "a lion that appeared, and seemed to come at me, with raised head and rabid hunger" (15); and "a she-wolf that looked full of craving in its leanness" (15). These are all adversaries that Dante must overcome – challenges that make him realize a change in lifestyle is necessary and he chooses to embark on his journey through the underworld in search of a moral compass. Similarly, Luffy also meets foes like this prior to his trek through Impel Down.

For example, he defeats Rob Lucci, a member of CP-0 and user of the zoan-type Cat-Cat Fruit Leopard Model, and comes into contact with Jabra, a former member of CP-9 and user of the zoan-type Dog-Dog Fruit Wolf Model. Although Luffy does not encounter him until after Imepi Down, there is also a lion in the story – Shiki, the captain of the Golden Lion Pirates and the only other man to escape from Impel Down prior to Luffy. These interactions with beasts are significant for both Dante and Luffy because they inspire the two characters to reach for personal goals: moral compass for Dante and physical strength for Luffy. For example, during most of his battles traveling the sea, Luffy does not have to exert much energy. It is only in his battle with Lucci that Luffy seems to be challenged, which signifies that he needs to be stronger to survive in the New World. But the similarities do not stop there. On his journey, Dante meets and talks with people he knew in life; in Luffy's case, many of the prisoners he meets in Impel Down are people he fought and defeated during his travels as a pirate. Since Luffy caused their capture, most of these prisoners hold a grudge against him and try to betray him to prison guards.

In addition to the similarities between Luffy and Dante, references to the "Inferno" are clear in the construction of the levels of Impel Down in Oda's *One Piece*.

1. Level 1: Limbo vs. Crimson Hell

The first circle of Dante's Hell is called Limbo. The souls found here are suspended there, not fit for heaven for a variety of reasons, but must remain in Limbo without hope. Virgil says "they had no sin ... [but] because they were not baptized ... [or] lived before Christianity, they did not worship God correctly. ... For this defect, and for no other fault, we are lost" (28). This is the same level in which Dante meets with many of the same poets, philosophers, and other great figures that he loves and admires.

Oda's first level of Impel Down condemns its inmates to harsher punishment than Limbo. Known as the Crimson Hell, this level is a forest full of trees with sharp blades. The

prisoners are chased through the forest daily and cut to pieces, hence the name "crimson." This forest may be Oda's version of the forest in Dante's seventh circle of Hell in which the suicides are doomed to live life as trees. Yet, as in Limbo, the prisoners held in the Crimson Hell seem not to deserve their fate. In fact, it is mostly full of the "joke" pirates, or the weak pirates that Luffy defeated during his first few battles at sea. Luffy is almost as excited about this as Dante is about the poets, because Luffy is oblivious and thinks he can be friends with everyone. Boa Hancock, the empress of Amazon Lily helps Luffy gain entry to Impel Down, jeopardizing her status as a Seven Warlord and effectively threatening the safety of her island and tribe. Hancock is a Beatrice-like figure. But while Beatrice sends Virgil as a guide and acts as a guide herself in "Paradise," Hancock only helps Luffy break into Impel Down. Instead, Luffy navigates most of level one alone until he finds Buggy the Pirate, the first pirate he fought while on the sea. Buggy pretends that he will help Luffy find Ace if Luffy helps him escape. But his main goal is ditch Luffy as soon as possible and head for the exit.

2. Level 2: The Carnal Sinners vs. Wild Beast Hell

Dante's second circle of Hell is full of eternal darkness and perilous winds. It is also where the lustful sinners and Minos live. The two levels do not directly correlate with one another because Oda's second level is called the Wild Beast Hell. It is full of beasts, including basilisks, manticores, sphinxes, etc., that continuously and restlessly chase prisoners night and day. The "Inferno" also houses beasts like these. For example, Geryon dwells between the seventh and eighth circles of the "Inferno" and Durling believes Dante draws on a wide variety of sources in its creation, particularly the Manticore as described by Brunetto Latini in *Tresor*. Oda's manticores have human faces and the bodies of lions; Geryon has a human face, a serpentine body, and features from a lion and scorpion. Both writers use serpents frequently.

Oda uses basilisks in the Wild Beast Hell and Hancock's companion is a snake and Dante's Geryon has a body like a serpent, which is not typical of a manticore. This may be tied to the religious symbolism that emerges in Oda's Level 5.5, described in more detail in Chapter 3.

3. Level 3: The Gluttonous vs. Starvation Hell

The third circle in Dante's Hell is where all of the gluttonous and greedy sinners are sent. The beast Cerberus resides here. Oda's version of the third level is clearly based on Dante's third circle for he creates it as a Starvation Hell where "they torture prisoners by restricting food and water... to make matters worse, the heat is from the Inferno Hell on the floor below" (*Volume 54: UnStoppable* 154). This punishment provides a clear parallel to Dante's third circle. Level 3 is also where Luffy finds a true and loyal guide through Impel Down, or his version of Dante's Virgil. Buggy tries to trick and betray him every step of the way. Fortunately, he discovers a former friend and ally Bon Kurei in a cell in Starvation Hell. Bon is dedicated to Luffy and immediately agreed to help him save Ace. He is so loyal that he later sacrifices himself in order for Luffy to escape Impel Down safely.

4. The Avaricious vs. Inferno Hell

The fourth layer of Dante's Hell is home to the souls who were greedy during life. They are split into two groups: those that hoarded material possessions and those that spent lavishly. The two groups constantly oppose one another. Oda's fourth level is quite a bit different. Prisoners here are tortured by being thrown into a boiling pot of blood or hung by ropes over flames. This is similar to a punishment in Dante's seventh circle where the violent lie in a river of boiling blood. Oda's entire fourth level is covered in flames and everything is burning. Oda's version of the river Styx is also here, but it is lava instead of water. In the "Inferno", Styx covers most of the fifth circle.

Luffy is captured in the Inferno Hell after a long battle with the prison's warden, Magellan. Magellan has a unique devil fruit power that allows him to spit poison. In fact, his entire body is poison and another person can be injured just from coming into contact with him. Magellan may Oda's way of representing the devil in Impel Down.

5. *The Wrathful vs. Frozen Hell*

In the fifth circle of Dante's "Inferno," the wrathful battle each other and the sullen lie doomed in the river Styx. Oda's fifth level is quite a bit different. The Frozen Hell is so cold that most prisoners are either frostbitten or freeze to death. But the extreme temperatures make it impossible for surveillance equipment to work, and things can go undetected on this level which might not be possible on others. After Luffy's fight with Magellan, he is thrown into the forest of Frozen Hell to die. He is almost attacked by wolves before Bon finds and saves him. This pairing is interesting because the Frozen Hell is one of the most infamous levels, known for the cruel torturous temperatures. It is also the same level in the "Inferno" that Dante and Virgil find difficult to pass through. Instead, Dante uses ice in his ninth circle of Hell, with Satan frozen at the center.

6. *The Heretics vs. NewKama Land*

This pairing is somewhat ironic. Dante's sixth level is full of heretics. The Furies live here and there are flames blazing throughout, and some may believe that it lines up best with Oda's fourth layer, Inferno Hell. But Oda's sixth layer is actually Level 5.5 also known as NewKama Land. It is the secret Level 5.5 situated in hollowed out rock between levels 5 and 6, and it is not even an official level of Impel Down. But this level is full of "heretics" in the traditional definition because it is populated by transvestites. There is a more detailed analysis of this level in relation to *Rocky Horror Picture Show* in Chapter 3 starting on page 37.

7. *The Violent vs. Eternal Hell*

The seventh circle of "Inferno" is where the violent are doomed to remain for eternity. Split into three rings, this level is occupied by the murderers on the outside, suicides in the middle, and sodomites in the innermost ring. The murderers are punished in a river of boiling blood, just like the prisoners in Oda's Inferno Hell. Likewise, the suicides spend eternity as bushes and trees, and sodomites live in a desert of burning sand and rain. Oda takes quite a different approach to his final level. Instead of the punishments associated with Dante and the other levels of Impel Down, the prisoners in the Eternal Hell are treated almost exactly like those in a regular holding cell. All of the prisoners on this level are either given a life sentence or the death penalty, because the most dangerous criminals are placed here. There are no punishments because the prisoners are thought to be so dangerous and eccentric that boredom would be a better means of torture than any other. The Minotaur guards both Dante's seventh circle and Oda's Eternal Hell.

Clearly Oda bases his prison of Impel Down on Dante's "Inferno," both in terms of architecture and characters. This allows him to accomplish a number of ends. First, by pairing Dante with *One Piece*, Oda comments on the role of religion in politics and government. Hell is commonly associated with Christianity, and Dante's vision of Hell is split into levels based on the severity of different sins as defined by the Christian Bible. By taking this recognizable structure from a classic piece of Western literature and placing it into the setting of an impenetrable jail controlled by a World Government, he poses the question of how much control or power religion has in governmental decisions. He seems to think religious power in government isn't a good thing, especially a world-centric government that attempts to regulate and control everything, and which takes advantage of anything that might benefit it. An example of this is the Seven Warlords system. These seven pirates are trusted and utilized for government gain, whereas pirates that aren't strong enough to be of any use, or pirates that refuse an alliance, end up in Impel Down for their "sins." Thus Oda aligns "crime" with "sin." But strength does not

always matter. Despite Luffy's unbelievable strength and determination, the government wants him captured or killed rather than as an ally; they realize that he has a mind of his own, personal goals, and would never submit to government control. He is dangerous alive.

II. Two More Levels⁹

Oda's replica of Dante's "Inferno" consists of seven levels, including the secret level 5.5 known as NewKama Land, but Dante's original work details nine circles of Hell, the remaining two being Fraud and Treachery. Oda continues using Dante as an inspiration even after leaving Impel Down behind. The story does not end when Luffy reaches the bottom level. In fact, Ace is removed from the prison for execution before Luffy makes it to the Eternal Hell. Ace is on his way to the execution site while Luffy fights his way back out of Impel Down by initiating a mass breakout. As mentioned previously, Bon sacrifices himself for Luffy during this breakout. The prisoners need to make it out of the jail and onto a stolen boat in order to escape, but the Gates of Justice can only be opened from a control room within Impel Down. Accordingly, someone has to stay behind. Bon readily volunteers, although Luffy does not even recognize his sacrifice for what it is until they are already on the boat and going through the Gates.

The prisoners travel to Marineford, the island of Marine Headquarters and the site of Ace's execution. Many of the prisoners choose to fight with Luffy, some only want to travel to Marineford for their own gain, and others set out in an opposite direction on another small boat. The fight becomes one of the biggest wars in Pirate history and is known as the Battle of Marineford. I would argue that this war becomes Oda's levels 8 and 9. For example, Dante's eighth circle is home to the fraudulent souls, but it is split into multiple subsections and includes many different people. Dante meets sorcerers, prophets, counselors, alchemists, thieves, etc. Both of these circles are much more diverse in the souls that Dante finds than any other. At the same time, the Battle of Marineford draws prisoners, the

⁹ Most events discussed in this section concerning the Battle of Marineford take place in volumes 57-60.

Whitebeard Pirates (Ace's crew), the Blackbeard Pirates, the Marines, the Seven Warlords, and so many other important world organizations and infamous crews that have never been together in one place in the history of the *One Piece* world.

Dante's ninth circle of Hell is where the treacherous souls are sent. This circle is guarded by giants. Oda's ninth level, in a sense, is saving Ace. Ace certainly is considered treacherous to the Government because of his bloodline. While the battle ensues, Ace is kept chained to a small platform raised above the ground. He is also guarded by giants. Luffy is able to save Ace from the platform, but as they try to escape, Ace hears someone insult his captain Whitebeard and turns around to confront him. He ultimately ends up fighting the Marine admiral Akainu who can transform parts of his body into lava. Akainu punches a hole through Ace's chest, and Ace cannot recover. In his last words to Luffy, he says that his only regret is not being able to live long enough to see Luffy accomplish his goals.

III. The Travelling Hero

As a pirate, Luffy certainly does fit the description of traveler, but pirates are not often described as heroes. However, Oda spends over 500 chapters prior to this storyline making readers fall in love with his protagonist. Every reader cheers for Luffy, because he performs more acts of kindness and saves more islands and citizens than the World Government could ever hope to. In fact, the government usually acts as the antagonist of the story. For the most part, Luffy's interactions with them are rare and quick, but in these three volumes he does the unthinkable; not only does he break into and escape from the Naval stronghold, but he also orchestrates a mass breakout of prisoners and nearly destroys the prison in the process. Oda establishes a connection between Luffy and Dante, as both travel down through the depths of their respective "hells" in search of something. White Dante hopes to find his "moral compass," Luffy's main goal is to save Ace before his scheduled execution.

It's at this point in the manga that Ace becomes a symbol for an ideal or growth in Luffy's character rather than an actual physical character himself. It is interesting that Dante enters Hell searching for a "moral compass" and he enters alone apart from his guides. Likewise, Luffy is also forced to enter alone with the help of Boa Hancock (a.k.a. Beatrice) –after he is conveniently separated from his crew who rarely leave his side. They needed to be separated because it is a journey that Luffy must make alone. His strength is tested against Magellan and the punishments on various levels, but it is also a journey that helps him reevaluate his strengths and abilities while he meets with all the criminals and fellow pirates, most of whom he was responsible for placing in jail to begin with. Dante has a similar experience while he travels through Hell and meets many people he knew in life.

In a sense, Ace serves as the equivalent of Dante's "moral compass" for Luffy. But Luffy isn't able to save Ace. I would argue that Ace's death was necessary in order for Luffy to realize his full potential. Luffy is generally an oblivious happy-go-lucky character and tends to find it hard to imagine bad things happening to those he loves. He also never doubts his ability to accomplish a goal. His failure to save Ace makes him realize that bad things can happen and that he is not yet strong enough to survive in the New World without training. And Luffy certainly understands the implications. After the war, Luffy spends two years training with Raleigh, the only surviving member of Gol. D Roger's crew.

CHAPTER 3

The Rocky Horror Picture Show: A Paradoxical Paradise

Oda creates a unique and unusual pairing by juxtaposing Dante against the 1970s cult-classic film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, written by Jim Sharman and Richard O'Brien and directed by Sharman. In the musical, newly engaged couple Brad and Janet find themselves stranded on the side of the road due to car trouble in the middle of a rain storm. The only house in sight is a dark, outlandish castle. With no sign of the storm letting up, they knock at Dr. Frank N. Furter's door. Frank is a mad scientist who calls himself "a sweet transvestite from Transsexual Transylvania" (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). It's later revealed that Transsexual is an alien planet in the galaxy of Transylvania (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). His original mission on Earth is unknown, but he spends his time creating a Frankensteinesque muscle man named Rocky in his laboratory. When Brad and Janet arrive, Frank and the other Transsexuals are dressed in revealing clothing and celebrating an Annual Transylvanian Convention. The couple is convinced to stay the night and Frank seduces both separately. This prompts Janet to also be intimate with Rocky; possibly resulting in the end of her engagement to Brad. The musical ends when the scientist's fellow aliens Riff Raff and Magenta turn against Frank. They kill Rocky and Frank; they release Brad, Janet, and the rest of the prisoners; and then lift the castle up into the sky and disappear.

I. Two Transvestites (or Transsexuals?)

The term transvestite commonly refers to a person that enjoys dressing as a member of the opposite sex. As a self-proclaimed "sweet transvestite," Frank N. Furter certainly fits the bill. The terminology becomes a little fuzzy when one considers his origin. From Transsexual Transylvania he is

respectively a “Transsexual,” just like we might call someone from the United States an American. The term transsexual is sometimes used interchangeably with transgender, and can refer to someone who has changed sexual orientation, wishes to change sexual orientation, or identifies as the opposite gender. Frank is sexually interested in men and women, and does not seem to associate with one sexual orientation over another, despite his



Figure 8: *One Piece*'s Emporio Ivankov (left) juxtaposed against *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s Dr. Frank N. Furter (right).¹⁰

apparel. Instead, he can be better described as a crossdressing bisexual, since he dresses like a female but still has clearly defined masculine features and tendencies.

So why might Sharman and O'Brien have placed Frank in Transsexual Transylvania rather than a place like Transvestual Transylvania? Oda explores these possibilities in *One Piece* through his character Emporio Ivankov. Before he was imprisoned in Impel Down, Ivankov was the Queen of the Kamabakka Queendom, a kingdom on Momoiro Island on the Grand Line full of citizens called okama (in Japanese Okama is a slang term for a homosexual or a drag queen). Ivankov was imprisoned for serving a leading role in the Revolutionary Army alongside Luffy's father. But instead of wasting away in the Frozen Hell level of Impel Down like most prisoners, he manages to slip away and create the secret Level 5.5, or NewKama Land, and create a paradise escape for prisoners.

Ivankov is nearly identical to Frank, as demonstrated in Figure 8¹⁰ above. Although Oda has certainly taken liberties with color choice, Ivankov and Frank are similar in that they both wear fishnet

¹⁰ Image used in accordance with Section 107, Fair Use, of the Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code. Available at: <http://ravenskyler.deviantart.com/art/Emporio-Ivankov-and-Dr-Frank-N-Furter-420375155> (18 March 2016)

tights, elbow-length gloves, a substantial amount of makeup, afro hair, high-heeled shoes, a cape (Frank N. Furter's not pictured), and the unmistakable white pearl necklace. They even have some of the same mannerisms; they thrive while performing on stage, sing often, and use feminine gestures and body language. Frank calls Brad the "candyman" (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and Ivankov calls his followers "candies" and "candykids" (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*) which might be a sexual innuendo. But neither hesitates to assert their point with masculine-associated traits like violence, physical force, and a powerful voice. For example, Frank murders a man named Eddie in a jealous rage. Likewise, Ivankov is not afraid to use his physical strength to protect himself or his friends.

If Frank and Ivankov are so similar, Ivankov cannot be strictly defined as transsexual either. But Ivankov has powers that Frank lacks: a devil fruit. Ivankov ate the Horu Horu no Mi fruit, which gave him the ability to heal, transform, or perfect the human body by injecting hormones. If he injects hormones into himself, he can transform into a woman, and then back into a man with another injection. If the definition of transsexual is someone who has changed their sexual orientation physically, then Oda transformed Frank N. Furter to fit that description with Ivankov. But transsexual can also mean associating with one sex while being trapped in the body of another. Ivankov makes it his goal to help others realize this about themselves. For example, when we are first introduced to Ivankov, a man with a cannon barges in and demands revenge against Ivankov for turning his father into a woman. Ivankov replies "Your father wanted to become a woman. Deal with it! ... Man or woman or both, be whatever you want to be. I've already shattered the borders of gender! We all have! We've already transcended it! We are the new humans – the new kama!" (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 102). In a sense, he offers a sexual awakening. This might be an extension of Frank N. Furter's own work in sexual awakening. For example, after Frank's sexual encounter with Janet (who has been saving herself for Brad), she

undergoes a “transformation” and actively pursues intercourse with Rocky. Frank also says “Be it. Don’t dream it” (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). Oda does not just ask his audience to find the connections between the two. He also challenges readers to consider how Ivankov might advance or add to the discussion begun in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. For example, Ivankov directly addresses the problem of trans acceptance in society, telling the man with a cannon to “deal with it,” and he makes no apologies for himself or the other new kama. In fact, he seems to think that the new kama have transcended to a level above others. I do not think Oda suggests here that trans people or those that are commonly classified as “other” are better than other parts of society. Instead, he might be suggesting that once an individual is able to accept all people, no matter their differences, they reach a level of transcendence. On the other hand, Frank – confined to his 1970s debut – must make his point in a fantastical setting far from reality, where he is a crossdressing alien that Brad and Janet both fear and dismiss as ridiculous. Frank is not a hero in the end of *Rocky Horror*, but Ivankov is idolized almost like a miracle worker, giving him unmistakable ties to religious figures, as discussed in the next section.

II. A Christ-like Figure

One of the defining similarities between Ivankov and Frank is the leadership roles they assume. As the former Queen of Kamabakka Queendom and the founder of NewKama Land, Ivankov is respected and admired. On the other hand, it is uncertain how much power and leadership Frank had on Transsexual, although he is the leader of their operation on Earth. The main difference between the two is that Oda takes Ivankov’s leadership a step further. The Queen is admired by some as a “miracle worker” and called Lord Iva by his followers (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*). His character is very similar to a Christ-like figure with his work in miracles, the title of Lord, and his loyal band of followers. In some sense, Ivankov is even crucified and rises again. For example, during the masa breakout of Impel Down, Ivankov sacrifices himself for Luffy and his people” (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*), much like the Bible says

Jesus sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity. Everyone assumes Ivankov is dead. Then, just before the prisoners set sail on a stolen ship to escape the naval stronghold, Ivankov reappears or “rises again” (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*). Oda transforms Ivankov into a religious symbol, and *Rocky Horror’s* Frank can be seen the same way. Although he does not rise again before the end of the movie, we can say that he was crucified at the end by his traitorous followers (symbolic of Judas, the rogue disciple).

Some might find it offensive or difficult to believe that Oda and Sharman chose to model their transvestites in a Christ-like image, even given the evidence. But it is hard to deny that both characters have a God-complex. Ivankov and Frank both work to alter the physical body. Because of his devil fruit powers, Ivankov defines himself as “an engineer of the human body [who] can alter people from the inside” (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 114). Frank uses science to build a man. In one of his songs, he sings “In just seven days I can make you a man” (“I Can Make You a Man” *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*). This is interesting because Ivankov gives the same time frame, about six to seven days, for Luffy’s recovery. The number seven may come from the idea that the Judeo-Christian creation story also works on a seven day time frame. The number seven is also important in Greek mythology and Classical texts, as is the idea of physical transformation. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Tiresias, a blind prophet, is transformed into a woman for seven years as punishment for striking snakes. Thus, another reference to snakes and a sexual transformation like those that we see Ivankov and Frank causing.

Ivankov has two different ideas for “making a man.” He can literally transform people from man to woman, but his work to rehabilitate Luffy is a more metaphorical making of a man, like a coming-of-age story. Ivankov says “You call me the miracle worker, but I’m no God! ... I won’t waste my time saving fools who can’t save themselves! Even with nations that were about to suffer economic collapse or be torn apart by wars, all I did was focus their will to live” (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 113). Frank says the same thing in a more subtle manner: “I’ll remove the cause but not the symptom” (*The Rocky Horror*

Picture Show). In Luffy's case, he has been so badly injured that he should not be able to survive, even with Ivankov's help. In fact, Ivankov's hormones are so harsh and painful that Luffy spends hours strapped to a metal bed in a secluded room screaming (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*). The only way Luffy can recover is to have the willpower and the mindset to make it through, and of course he does not disappoint. Instead of the six to seven days of allotted time that Ivankov said he would need, Luffy manages to regain consciousness and mobility after less than a day, and in plenty of time to continue his rescue mission (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope*). Ivankov believes that "whether you live.. or die... depends on your own willpower (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 109), and Luffy's survival and quick recovery was all due to his willpower to survive and protect Ace and his crew.

Not only are the two characters symbolic of religious figures, but they both create respective spaces for their followers to live in that are referred to as paradises. When Bon regains consciousness after saving Luffy on Level 5 and finds himself in NewKama Land, he is shocked by what he sees, stating "No way! You're wearing nice clothes! You're eating delicious food! You're drinking booze! Is this... paradise?!... Or maybe I died of hypothermia. Is this the afterlife?" (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 92). Even Ivankov himself says "this is our garden of freedom" (*Volume 55: A Ray of Hope* 102) which prompts the reader to connect it to the paradise Garden of Eden in the *Bible*. NewKama Land is essentially an escape from Hell, but it is hard to evaluate who is offered that escape and who is doomed to suffer in Impel Down until death. Ivankov explains that the residents of NewKama Land are all lost prisoners that found their way to the paradise through one of the many hidden passages. If we continue the religious analogy, this is similar to the way that Christians talk about how a "lost" soul finds their way to Christ.

III. Escape Plan

Level 5.5, also known as NewKama Land, is a secret hidden level in hollowed out rock between levels five and six of Impel Down. The staff is unaware of the hideout, even though prisoners frequently

mysteriously disappear. Guards think the disappearances are the devil's calling, and that those prisoners have died or been pulled down into Hell, which is ironic considering Impel Down is a replica of Hell. Instead, the vanished prisoners escape to a Heaven within Hell which happens to be a representation of Frank's castle and environment in *Rocky Horror*.

Oda's inclusion of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in the middle of Dante's "Inferno" is jarring to say the least, and it can be difficult to find connections. But in anime, everything is possible, and connections may be hiding in the most unexpected places. An intern at the Orange County Anime Expo said "If you choose to breathe life into it, it can become an open-ended world where anything and everything can happen" (Hardesty). Seeing Ivankov as a Jesus-like figure certainly opens a host of possibilities in connection with Dante's "Inferno." At a base level, comparing the story to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, creates an extra layer of urgency to the plot. Brad and Janet enter Frank's castle and immediately announce they are in a hurry, even though the clock works against them. The same thing is happening with Ace and Bon. Ace's execution is scheduled for a certain time, and he will be transported to the execution site from Impel Down not long before that time. Luffy knows how much time he has, and Ace constantly pauses in the manga to remind the reader how many hours are left. This sense of urgency is not present in Dante's "Inferno."

Oda adds an extra layer to the "Inferno" with this secret level resembling Heaven within Hell. Dante's work features an abundance of sufferers and there is no hope of escape once a soul is doomed to a layer of Hell. Oda's prison version of Hell does allude to the possibility of escape, and NewKama Land provides that hope. Even though the story ultimately culminates with Ace's death, Luffy still manages to reach a personal discovery and start a worldwide war with the government. I think one of Oda's main accomplishments with this pairing is the doubt he sparks in readers about government institutions as well as the questions he raises about the role of religion in government.

CONCLUSION

"Those who think that seeing beyond the surface or *tatemae* level of Japanese culture has relevance only to Japanophiles or language students probably don't realize just how much influence Japan is exerting over our daily lives today, or how deep that influence goes. Manga and anime have permeated into the bastion of American civilization known as 'pop culture' and have slowly wormed their way into the collective consciousness of the English-speaking world." (Schodt *Dreamland* 31)

Manga is a multi-faceted genre that can be a form of entertainment, an educational tool, or a new way to repurpose old media. Oda's *One Piece* is all three and there are many manga that work in the same way. Although the genre originated in Japan, it has spread rapidly throughout the world, signifying a shift from our emphasis on textual literacy to visual literacy.

Considering original texts alongside their manga counterparts can teach missing social cues. For example, many manga scholars believe the genre can help build a reader's ability to understand body language, to analytically interpret art, and to communicate more efficiently with others. These skills are important because the next generation entering the job market is the same generation that built communication skills through screens with text, instant messaging, and social media. But manga can do more than work as a substitute for Classical texts. It may also serve as an encouragement to the study of them. Oda in particular uses these texts in a way that it becomes a game for the reader. The more his audience knows about these source texts the more fun it is for them to spot the references while they read *One Piece*. He offers not only a new way to interpret these source texts, but a new way through which we can analyze and consider Western culture.

Yet most manga exaggerate their stories and their representations of the human body (particularly the female body). Schodt also worries that the line between content for children and adults in manga is blurred more than any other genre (*Dreamland* 70). Although manga certainly have a future in the publishing industry, it is an uncertain one. Schodt questions "What will it mean when entire

generations start living in a comic book reality, or when they have formed many of their impressions of other nations and peoples from manga?" (*Dreamland* 70). Schodt's statement is similar to the idea that video games can make the player more violent. It can even go back to around the 1800s-early 1900s when it was considered unacceptable to read novels. Behind every new media is a fear of detrimental change. And Schodt, writing in the mid-1990s, considered the fear manga distilled in nations across the world. It cannot be ignored that the same fear is still alive among librarians, parents, educators, lovers of literature and even fans of manga. But if we have learned anything from the past, the fear of a new medium can be more detrimental than acceptance. In order for us to understand what is dangerous about long-term reading of manga, we must first understand the benefits. And to understand, we must read.

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